

EDITORIAL

Reinventing Academic Publishing

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Unlike most academic journals, advances.in/psychology aims to publish high-quality research and to financially compensate editors as well as reviewers for their work. As incoming editor-in-chief, I explain how this publishing model works, give an overview of the journal and its mission, and present our future perspective on academic publishing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Why do we need a new journal? Academic publishing has undergone several remarkable developments over the past decades. Especially the success of the Open Access model and the relatively widespread adoption of Open Science standards (Nosek et al., 2015) have made science more accessible and reliable than ever before. However, one flawed aspect of academic publishing has remained almost entirely unchanged. Highly profitable publishers still rely on the free labor of overburdened reviewers (and editors) disguised to them as a free service to the community rather than a multi-billion industry. With advances.in/psychology, we aim to start the first chapter of a more sustainable academic publishing model that publishes high-quality, reliable research while financially compensating editors and reviewers for their work.

2. WHY IT IS TIME FOR A CHANGE

Over the past decades, the number of academic papers published yearly has surged to record levels (Fire & Guestrin, 2019). Many scientists may applaud this development. More research means more knowledge about the world, which will often help improve our societies. However, with the rapidly increasing number of publications, the burden on reviewers has increased enormously. A total of one million academic papers were published in 1990, whereas this number reached more than seven million in recent years (Fire & Guestrin, 2019). Although the academic sector certainly has expanded to some extent over this period, it has far from increased sevenfold (Oecd, 2022). Consequently, the “publish or perish culture” has increased the burden on authors and reviewers alike.

Although most of us would agree that the roles of authors and reviewers are both essential to academic publishing, they are not nearly valued

equally. Authors get recognition in form of publications in their name and are usually paid by their institutions for the research they conduct. By contrast, reviewers, who devote their time, energy, and expertise to benefit authors, journals, and the field get no or very little recognition. Also critically, they are almost never financially compensated for the work they frequently have to conduct in their free time to stay on top of things. Even the reward scheme that some publishers have developed “translates in a real value that is close or equal to zero for the reviewers” (Copiello, 2018, p. 613). This lack of compensation explains why a smaller share of scholars has to carry most the collective reviewing burden (Kovanis et al., 2016).

When we first are socialized into the academic world, we are told that reviewing papers is a noble service to the community. However, what we are not told is that the journals we review for are owned by a multi-billion industry that, year after year, achieves profit margins unheard of in other sectors. The pressing question then is, why is it that academic publishing is so extremely lucrative? A key reason is that it exploits the free labor of reviewers and sometimes even editors. We believe the creation of a more sustainable and equitable academic publishing model is overdue. Therefore, we created the academic publisher *Advances.in* and its first flagship journal *advances.in/psychology*.

3. OUR MISSION: FROM OPEN TO SUSTAINABLE SCIENCE

We aim to establish a psychology journal that publishes high-quality, reliable research that adheres to current Open Science standards and makes research openly available. However, unlike almost all existing journals, we will pay editors *and* reviewers for their work. While this idea is not new, it has received several pushbacks, mainly from established academic publishers (Brainard, 2021).

One central argument against paying reviewers that has been brought up is that it undermines researchers' intrinsic motivation and leads them to chase quick returns instead of doing a thorough job (Brainard, 2021). Although a work environment solely focused on financial gains may certainly shift people's motivation, paying people for their work generally improves work performance (Garbers & Konradt, 2014). Experiments demonstrate that paying peer reviewers a reasonable sum (in this case \$100) reduces the time they need to review a paper without compromising the quality of the review (Chetty et al., 2014). Others show that comparably smaller payments (e.g., €14.90) reduce the quality of reviews (Squazzoni et al., 2013). We are convinced that the fair financial compensation of reviewers will increase the review quality overall, provided several quality checks are in place, as described in the next section.

3.1 Our Publishing Model

Our publishing model is straightforward and includes simple extensions of the prevailing model that also should be easy to implement for other publishers. First, editors contact reviewers for a potential review task. The reviewers then decide whether they want to accept the task. If so, they are asked to sign an agreement that hires them as consultants and specifies the task, conditions, and financial compensation. This part is effortless as it is seamlessly integrated into our submission system and handled by an acknowledged e-signature specialist (SignNow). Once the agreement is signed, the review process begins. Whereas the length of the process will naturally vary for each submission, our goal is to have no more than two rounds of evaluations provided by the reviewers per submission on average to reduce the burden on them.

When the review process is completed (which may have involved several rounds of reviews), and the editor decides to reject or accept the



paper, the editor is asked to rate the quality of the reviews that were provided. They will first evaluate whether the review quality passed predefined minimum quality requirements. These requirements are outlined to the reviewer in advance and published and updated regularly on our web page. Importantly, the requirements are independent of the reviewer's recommendations to accept or reject the manuscript. The goal of the requirements is simple to ensure a satisfactory degree of engagement with the submission as evident through the review. Provided the requirements were met, the reviewer will next be asked to invoice the publisher and will be paid within short time.

The editor will also score the review quality on a sliding scale and, in the case of relatively low scores, highlight ways in which the reviews may be improved in the future. The score will be stored within the system. It will not influence whether a reviewer is paid but will allow us to select the best performing reviewers over time.

As we start the journal, we will pay reviewers following a 2-tier system. The first three completed review processes per year (that each may involve multiple reviews of the same paper) will each be compensated with \$100 (USD). Any additional completed review process during the same year will be compensated with \$150 (USD). We are aware that this payment may be financially more attractive to some scholars than others depending on their career stage, salary and other factors. Yet, in any case, we believe that most scholars will value it as an honest appreciation of their work. We also give reviewers the option to donate the money to a charitable cause. Depending on *Advances.in*'s economic viability, we hope to adjust the payment upward whenever possible.

Economically, our publishing model is, like most other open-access journals, financed by an Article Processing Charge (APC) that authors pay upon acceptance of their work. Unlike most

other journals, a part of this APC is used to finance the peer-review process. Some may argue that it would be better to start a free journal that is entirely run by volunteers at each level of the publication process. While we certainly see this as a worthwhile model, it is hard to imagine that it will be able to compete with resourceful multi-billion corporations in effectiveness, impact, and reach. That is why our goal at *Advances.in* is to demonstrate that it is possible for academic publishing to be fair and profitable. Naturally, as our financial opportunities grow, we will offer reduced fees and waivers to scholars who cannot afford to pay the APC.

3.2 The Scope of the Journal

The journal *advances.in/psychology* will be broad, accepting submissions that significantly advance the state of the art in the various psychology subdisciplines. It will have two formats—a short format of 5,000 words for empirical submissions, and a 10,000 words format for reviews and meta-analyses. We will make exceptions to this rule on an individual basis. The journal places a strong emphasis on Open Science guidelines. For instance, we strive to follow the Transparency and Openness Promotion guidelines (Nosek et al., 2015) at high levels when it comes to (a) citation standards, (b) data, analytic methods (code), and research materials transparency, (c) design and analysis transparency, (d) pre-registration of studies, and (e) replication.

3.3 Editor

I have the honor of taking on the position of editor-in-chief during the inaugural period of two years. Although our goal is to pay editors for their work, I will as founder of the publisher work for free for this period. A possible reappointment for two additional years will be considered at a later time. Once the workload exceeds my work capacity, we will add paid associate editors to the journal. In addition, Dr.

John F. Dovidio will support me as consulting editor from the beginning on.

3.4 Editorial Board

Given the broad scope of the journal, our editorial board consists of scholars from various sub-disciplines. Our emphasis was on recruiting primarily early and mid-career scholars who have made crucial contributions to their fields and have shown a strong track record over the past years. However, our board also consists of highly profiled senior-level scholars. Moreover, a geographic spread and the representation of people with different identities and backgrounds were important, and we hope to be able to further increase the board's diversity in the future. During the review process, we will primarily rely on reviews by editorial board members to make reviewing for us a financially worthwhile activity for them.

3.5 Review Philosophy

For our publishing model to be financially viable, we need to conduct a thorough desk review and reject papers that are unlikely to reach the high quality we strive for after two rounds of reviews. Our ambition is to publish work that advances the respective field and is relevant also to a broader readership. Given this motivation, we will try to gather the reviews of one expert in the topic of the submission and another expert from a different field. We encourage reviewers to use a mentoring review style. Our aim is that reviews are as constructive as possible, no matter the editorial decision, so that they leave the authors in the best position to improve their work. Finally, to reduce biases as, for instance, recently documented by Huber et al. (2022), our journal practices double-blind review. However, for transparency, anonymized review reports will be made openly available alongside published articles.

4. OUR LONG-TERM VISION: CHANGING PUBLISHING NORMS

The success of our journal and publishing model will stand or fall on the academic community's willingness to make a conscious choice when selecting a journal for their work. Our long-term plan is to add journals in other research fields at appropriate intervals. Generally, we hope that we also can inspire other publishers to adopt similar practices. As such, we embrace competition and hope that paying scholars for their work will become the norm rather than exception in the foreseeable future. At a minimum, we hope that our model can co-exist on par with that of traditional academic publishers.

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